

FATHER MONSERRATE'S ACCOUNTS OF AKBAR'S EMPIRE: WAR, RELIGION AND JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

History is an intricate interpretation and scrutiny of bygone occurrences. As mankind has progressed and evolved, this led to the birth of a functioning community, a society. To understand humanity, the determining factor would be to fathom the characteristics and functioning of society. Various historians have written their experiences about the society that they resided in. One such account is that of Father Monserrate, who wrote during the reign of Akbar, one of the most prominent Mughal emperors. He was very enthusiastic to learn about various religions in his reign. Father Monserrate's commentary was a first-hand experience and so it became a primary source to understand and study the society as well as the Jesuit order during Akbar's reign. The objective of the research paper is to provide an objective view of how war, religion and justice influenced society during Akbar's reign. Various religious sites, rituals, and practices are explored in detail in these journals. These are mapped with modern practices for better identification in this paper. Similarly, we also analyse the broad spectrum of encounters and occurrences that the author came across as a Jesuit missionary at court. The nature of war in the Mughal era is explored in detail through Akbar's war with his brother Mirza Hakim. The Jesuit mission's frequent public religious debates with Akbar and his court also provide insights into questions about society, cultural diversity, and varied perceptions related to religion and social order in the Mughal empire by taking references from Father Monserrate's accounts. All this is laid out in this paper through the use of travel literature and literary analysis.

KEYWORDS: *Intricate Interpretation and Scrutiny of Bygone Occurrences*

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INTRODUCTION

The Mughal Empire was the most distinguished authority that had predominant control over the Indian Subcontinent. The empire was established by Babur, who was the ruler of Ferghana, present-day Uzbekistan in 1494¹. However, an internal conflict drove him out of his own kingdom, due to which he was compelled to capture Kabul. Following which Babur invaded India by defeating the Lodhi dynasty in 1526, thus initiating Mughal rule in India². Humayun was the son of Babur, who ascended the throne after the death of his father in 1530³. The success of the Mughal empire was short lived because of Humayun's defeat by Sher Shah Suri in 1540, yet Humayun reclaimed his power by invading India in 1555⁴. Although he reinstated his position as the king, the death of Humayun occurred a year after he slipped from the stairs of his palace. This event was a watershed in the history of the empire. This paved

¹ Munis D. Faruqi. The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1505-1719. Pp-12. Cambridge University Press. (2010).

² Munis D. Faruqi. The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719. Pp-12. Cambridge University press. (2010).

³ Munis D. Faruqi. The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719. Pp-13. Cambridge University press. (2010).

⁴ Munis D. Faruqi. The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719. Pp-13. Cambridge University press. (2010).

way for Humayun's son Akbar to ascend the throne who reigned from 1556 to 1605⁵. Akbar unlike his predecessors had a cross cultural approach in his rule and was more tolerant towards religions. Akbar's ardent inclination and curiosity to understand different cultures and religions led him to invite religious scholars. His intellectual curiosity paved the way for the maiden Jesuit Mission in the Mughal Empire, which commenced on November 17, 1579⁶. Father Rudolf Aquaviva, Father Enriquez, and Father Antonio Monserrate from the Catholic Society for Jesus were invited to the court of Akbar, where they were formally greeted by Abul Fazal who was a historian in the court of Akbar⁷. They travelled from Goa to Fatehpur Sikri. Father Monserrate was ordered by the Parochial Authority of Goa to maintain a detailed record of the mission. In the course of time, Monserrate was engaged in teaching Murad, who was the son of Akbar. Along with taking the responsibility of Murad, Monserrate had to go to the battlefields of the wars that Akbar fought with his brother as well as accompany him on long journeys to places such as Peshawar. Eventually, Monserrate was ordered to leave India. In the journey back to Portugal he was captured by the Arabs in Damascus while travelling in a Vessel and thrown into Dhafar prison⁸. He was allowed to complete his book in the prison. However, his work was never sent to Lisbon. Instead, they were found in St Paul's Cathedral in Calcutta. His works were widely explored by historians and intellects who have different perceptions which will be acknowledged through literature review.

Humanist or exclusivist⁹, a research article explains the differentiation between a comprehensive and humanistic inculturation, on one hand, and Christian exclusionism, on the other, exhibits a strain in his Commentary. Altogether, it is a pressure that can likewise be found in his Spiritual experiences. Hindus beyond the Hindu Kush: Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade¹⁰ is a journal article which gives us insights into slavery as per Monserrate's journal. It tells us about the incident when the authorities in the Mughal empire captured a ship sailing from Mecca to Surat and a considerable number of detainees died due to starvation, thirst and difficulty. Others were seized and unfairly sold into servitude by certain devious Christians. Security on the routes of Mughal India¹¹ is a journal article which specifies that Monserrate's travel account has references to thieves coming into the camps during wars. This is evident because there is an instance during battles which involved Timur¹², thieves entering his camps would have their noses

⁵Munis D. Faruqi. *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719*. Pp-13. Cambridge University press. (2010).

⁶Correia-Afonso, John. Ed. *Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar(1580-1583)*. St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981.

⁷ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

⁸ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-12. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

⁹Jessica Hope Lohner. Humanist or Exclusivist, A Critical Analysis of *The Commentary of Father Monserrate S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Regina, Saskatchewan. (2017).

¹⁰Scott Levi. Hindus beyond the Hindu Kush: Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 12(3), 277-288. (2002).

¹¹Nazer Aziz Anjum "SECURITY ON THE ROUTES IN MUGHAL INDIA." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 66. pp. 446–455. (2005).

¹² Irfan Habib. Timur in the Political Tradition and Historiography of Mughal India. p. 295-312. Asian Centrale. Iran. (1997). Timur was a Shia Muslim and an ancestor of the Mughals. Father Monserrate exclusively mentioned about the battle between Timur and Genghis Khan.

perforated with an awl. Pattern of Bengal's overseas trade under the Mughals¹³ is an article which tells us that Monserrate affirms that Akbar even straightforwardly connected with himself in trade exercises. With the victory of Gujarat, only two years before the conquest of Bengal offered him an occasion to carry on maritime exchange and bows, greaves and shoes are additionally sent out by merchants to all the urban areas of the empire.

Father Monserrate wrote extensively about the wars he witnessed during Akbar's reign. One such account is Mirza Hakim's attempt to conquer India. He was the nominal viceroy of Kabul and the stepbrother of Akbar¹⁴. He was partisan to Islamic way of ruling unlike Akbar's pluralistic society, he was supported by people who considered Akbar's secularism as a threat to Islam. Mirza Hakim wanted to claim the throne of the Mughal empire. He prepared an army of fifteen thousand Mongol cavalry and crossed the Indus in order to conquer Akbar's territory¹⁵. He crossed the Indus and approached Lahore, he also ordered his troops that they ought to do no mischief to anybody, no fields were to be crushed and the residents of Lahore were to stay untouched. He was constrained to stop close to Lahore due to the fortification of Ruytasiumi¹⁶ which was held by Mirza Yusuf Khan¹⁷. who declined to give up it because he was given the authority to supervise it by the emperor and that he would only surrender if there was a conquest. This was how the war began. Eventually, Hakim realized that none of the aristocrats were set up to abandon his brother, and that, even those tricksters who had welcomed him into India would not back up their guarantees, for he got no reinforcements. He started to fear his brother's noteworthy forces and assets, and that he had to endure such a huge amount on an intrusion, which was doomed to disappointment. His supplies were coming up short and he started to imagine that he would need to withdraw. But Akbar had ulterior motives, he invited Hakim for peace in order to bring him close to the capital, which gave Akbar the chance to wage war. The advancement of troops was ordered on February 8th 1581¹⁸. So far, Hakim was left with three cavalry troops and didn't have enough supplies to fight Akbar's enormous military capabilities. Akbar had fifty thousand cavalry, five hundred fighting elephants and camels, and an almost countless number of infantries¹⁹. Some were positioned at a distance of eighteen miles from the camp in each bearing, to be pared for an ambush or an open advancement of the foe. In limited places he positioned stations for what it's worth, accordingly saving the entire armed force from nervousness and risk by methods for the administration of a couple of men. In the outcome of these safety measures, the military managed to look for shade and water, and slept as safely at night in the warzone unlike the

¹³Phanindra Nath Chakraborty. PATTERN OF BENGAL'S OVERSEAS TRADE UNDER THE MUGHALS—A SECOND LOOK. Vol 45.pp. 375-383. (1954).

¹⁴ W. Lees and Ahmad Ali. Badaouni's. Account Mirza Hakim's 1581 invasion of Hindustan, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, vol. 2, Pp-291-295. (Calcutta, 1864).

¹⁵ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-71. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

¹⁶ Abu'l-Fazl. *Ain-I-Akbari*. pp-346. Translated by Henreich Bolchmann. (1873). Abul Fazal writes of him in connection with the event of 1580 as having defeated an advanced force of Mirza Hakim and as being in charge of Punjab.

¹⁷ Abu'l-Fazl. *Ain-I-Akbari*. pp-371. Translated by Henreich Bolchmann. (1873). This was the fort of Rohtas built in 1542 by Sher Shah and named after his other eyrie in Behar which had helped him so much in his rise to power.

¹⁸ Munis D. Faruqi. The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 48(4), Pp-487. (2005).

¹⁹ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-82. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

troops of Hakim. An important element which requires attention is that Akbar gave immense importance to military discipline. The military establishments had to endure punishments if they weren't obedient to the orders of the king. This was evident from the fact that If an authority is seen to breach the orders, he was thrown into the river by tying him to a bag, once he attains the mercy of Akbar, he would be sold as a slave in the bazaars²⁰. During the war, Akbar allowed trade by building bazaars near the camps so that merchants, farmers can sell their products and produce at the rate of their choice. Eventually, as the war progressed Mirza Hakim was defeated in 1582²¹. His downfall was inevitable because he wasn't as crafty as Akbar. He also lacked political support which in turn led to the dismal outcome of events. Mirza was also regarded as a feeble willed, hasty and by and large ill-suited to rule²². The development of a moderately cordial world of politics caused the Kingdom of Kabul a basic respite as an outcome of the war. This war concurred a focal spot in the Mughal empire's history. Akbar was sharply challenged by Mirza Hakim, who blamed Akbar for forsaking their family's Timurid legacy, Mirza was an impressive adversary. This war assumed a pivotal part in framing and molding large numbers of the political and strict decisions made by Akbar and his unfurling vision of power and furthermore shaping the future of the Mughal empire.

Religion and culture flourished during Akbar's reign. Father Monserrate has written about how he perceived different religions in the commentary. Since he was on a Jesuit Mission, he continuously added emphasis on Christianity being the only true religion and others were just a fallacy. He was very dissenting towards Krishna, a Hindu deity, he regarded him to be a filthy boy who broke pots, stole women's clothes and denied having done that way later, He also mentioned that Akbar believed in these narratives²³. He regarded Indians as uncivilized and heathens for believing in superstitious tales. He found the stories of Hinduism contemptible to the ears of shrewd and of men. Yet, he affirms that individuals following it can only be saved by the petition God²⁴. Society was embracing different religions; people were becoming more and more tolerant and a sense of togetherness seemed to appear. An incident mentioned by Monserrate tells us about an astrologer who was well acquainted with both Hindus and Musalmans in order to learn what the future holds, although Monserrate criticized this practice and tried convincing the masses that Christianity is supreme²⁵. Monserrate has no respect for the Hindus and their cultural beliefs. To ascertain this, he states multitudes of men and women ceremonially bathing in the river in perfect modesty during a pilgrimage²⁶. He despised it because his religion considers such events as blasphemous. Akbar had religious discussions in his court, this was an opportunity for him to learn and understand the rituals, philosophies and narratives related to each religion. The Jesuits

²⁰ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-83. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

²¹ Munis D. Faruqi. The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 48(4). (2005).

²² Frederick Augustus, G.B. Malleon. *The Emperor Akbar and history of Afghanistan*, vol. 1, 17-18. London (1890).

²³ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-92. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

²⁴ God refers to Christ. He is regarded by most Christians as the Incarnation of God.

²⁵ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-100. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

²⁶ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-102. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

on numerous occasions tried converting him, but his belief in Islam was firm and unyielding. Akbar always tried establishing connections between various religions during these discussions. On one such occasion, Akbar asked the Jesuits as to why Jesus Christ accepted the challenges put forth to him by the Jews. To this, the Jesuits gave the example of Abraham²⁷, the priests tried to convince the king on the basis that since Abraham was ordered to sacrifice Isaac by god, but Isaac was saved by god, which in turn ascertains the fact their god is existent²⁸. The Jesuits thought of Muhammad²⁹ as an imposter, and denied any similarities between the bible and the Quran. They considered anything other than the teachings of the gospel to be poisonous to the minds of a rational individual. Akbar listened to these discussions very carefully and drew different conclusions. These discussions helped him in framing a secular rule in society.

Although Akbar was a benevolent ruler, he did not tolerate mistakes and crimes committed by his public or his officials in any manner. They were given severe punishments if found guilty. Due to this all were apprehensive of his seriousness, and endeavor to do as he coordinates and wants. For the King has the right and equity in the undertaking. In the cases wherein he, goes about as judge the liable are, by his own bearings, not rebuffed until he has provided orders for the third time that this will be done. These were done in accordance with the musalman law and are there two ministers of justice, one primary, and the other for appeals. There is also a chief magistrate. Judgment is delivered only verbally, and is not recorded³⁰. The individuals who committed a capital wrongdoing were either squashed by elephants or hanged, philanderers were either choked or gibbeted; Akbar loathed intemperance and infidelity that neither impact nor pleas nor an extraordinary payoff which was offered would incite him to exonerate his administrative officials or the public for that matter³¹. There was never leniency in delivering these punishments. Department of Justice was known as *Mahakuma-e-Adalat*³². The Mughal Legal system was quite similar to that of contemporary India in terms of the mechanisms of appealing and demarcation of different levels of judicial authorities. The Judicial system during Akbar's reign ensured that the populous were civilised and respectful.

Henceforth to culminate, Wars, over time have seen an evolution starting from seeking power to protecting territories. They can be perceived in many different ways; some see war as a glorious victory and some loathe it for its consequences. Wars during the Mughal empire changed the perceptions about political order of the society and it helped in shaping stronger and self-reliant communities especially during Akbar's rule. Although, the conflict between universal ideals, unintended consequences and personal loyalties remains relevant than ever. Religion and cultural diversity made sure that the society during Akbar's reign, maintained equilibrium in the interests of gatherings and public, with no obstruction in their own convictions. The judicial system under Akbar created a proficient arrangement of governing authorities due to

²⁷ Abraham is one of the early prophets of Christianity.

²⁸ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-119. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

²⁹ Muhammad was the prophet of Islam who got his revelations from god, thus compiled the Quran.

³⁰ Dr. Shaikh Musak Rajjak. Justice and Punishment during Mughal Empire (Based on Foreign Travelogues). *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*. (2012).

³¹ Monserrate, Antonio. *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*. Pp-210. Translated by J.S. Hoyland. Annotated by S.N. Banerjee. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (2003).

³² Dighant Raj Seghal. Judicial system during the time of Mughals in India. October 18, (2020).

which an equanimous approach to upheld justice and righteousness was followed.

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